(HOWL #003)
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Beyond Society: How We Build Our Systems of Care Through Pack, Warren, Pride, & Flock Life

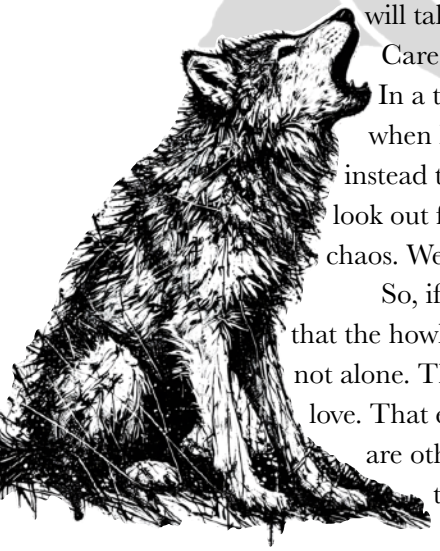
A little howl into the void
by Shimi

Little Howls Into the Void: A Call to Care, Community, & Kindness

These little howls into the void are not just calls to the lonely; they are signals, sent out into the dark, hoping to reach others who might be listening. They are small, songs, soft, sometimes informative, sometimes insistent, echoing into the unknown with the simple, radical belief that some creature out there needing to read this, will hear it. And if they do—if even one creature lifts their head in recognition, if even one soul feels less alone—then this has done its work.

Because at its heart, this is what it means to be part of something greater than ourselves. To reach out, even when we are unsure. To offer a moment of kindness, a shared warmth, a soft place to land. It is the belief that care is not just a personal act but a communal one. To take care of ourselves, we must also take care of each other.

These little howls are an offering, an open paw extended in friendship. They remind us that our voices matter—not because they are loud, not because they demand attention, but because they are real, and because they carry the weight of something tender, something essential. In a world that often pushes us toward isolation, toward the belief that we must fend for ourselves, these small howls defy that logic. They insist: No. We are here. We are together. And we will take care of one another.



Care is not just a necessity—it is an act of rebellion. In a time when exhaustion is seen as a virtue and when kindness is treated as a weakness, we choose instead to create spaces where gentleness thrives. We look out for each other. We build small sanctuaries amid chaos. We make sure no one is left behind.

So, if you are reading this, if you are listening, know that the howl is meant for you. It is a reminder that you are not alone. That you are part of something vast and full of love. That even in the quietest corners of the world, there are others—with outstretched, hearts open—waiting to welcome you home.

Shimi

How Therians Build Our Systems of Care Through Pack, Warren, Pride, and Flock Life

Society, as it is structured today, is not built to care for its individuals. It operates at a scale where care is administrated rather than lived, it is bureaucratised rather than felt. Communities, by contrast, are where real care happens—not out of obligation, but out of instinct, out of need, out of love.

For those of us who are therians, who experience ourselves in part as nonhuman creatures, this truth runs even deeper. We do not merely adopt community; we build kinship in the ways of the animals we align with, forming packs, warrens, prides, and flocks—structures of mutual care that exist outside the cold, impersonal hands of state and society.

This is not just metaphor. It is not merely a poetic way of understanding friendships or relationships. It is our lived reality. The way we gather, protect, and nurture one another is fundamentally different from the way society dictates care should happen. This is because our model of care is rooted in something deeper than societal obligation: it is rooted in our animal instincts, in the ways creatures in the wild survive together, and in a recognition that to be therian is not just to "identify as" but to live in a way that reflects our nature.

In this article, we will explore how therians create and sustain systems of care beyond the expectations of human society, and how our bonds, modelled after those of animals, are revolutionary acts of survival, resistance, and love.

And what for the non-therians, the completely human? While this zine speaks to therians, it is not only for us. Any creature who has felt abandoned by state and society, who has had to build family in the margins, may see themselves in these words. These structures of care —pack, warren, pride, flock—are not metaphors, but lived realities for many. Whether you experience yourself as animal or simply as someone seeking a different way of belonging, know that you, too, have a place in this ecosystem of care.

Society's Abandonment, Community's Claim

The state tells us it cannot care for us. Instead, it offers us bureaucracy: means-tested welfare, inaccessible healthcare, and laws that punish rather than protect. It insists that society is too large to accommodate individual needs, that the responsibility of care belongs to communities, families, and even the individuals themselves. Yet, even as the state sheds its responsibility, it polices and punishes the very people who build alternative systems of survival.

Mutual aid groups, community shelters, and chosen families—especially queer, disabled, and neurodivergent ones—become sites of resistance against a world that would rather see the vulnerable left behind. Therians, who often exist in the margins of queer and

neurodivergent spaces, understand this deeply. We know what it means to be told, "You must find your own way." And so, we do. We don't do it alone. We do it in the ways of instinct, as creatures, as kin.

Interdependence as Survival: How We Hold Each Other Up

Mainstream society promotes and encourages an illusion of independence—of self-reliance as a virtue, of individualism as strength. We are told that to stand alone is to be powerful, that to need others is a failure of will, that survival is a competition rather than a shared endeavour. But in reality, no creature survives alone. Even the most solitary predators rely on an ecosystem that sustains them. A lone wolf may hunt, but it is a pack that raises its young, teaches survival, and ensures that none fall behind. Lions do not rule alone; they build prides that nurture, protect, and defend their own. Birds do not migrate without a murmuration to guide them, without a shared rhythm that carries them across vast distances. The world itself is interconnected—trees communicating through roots, rivers feeding the land, the pulse of existence a network of mutual reliance.

And yet, we are told to sever these connections. To build walls instead of bridges. To hoard rather than to share. The systems we live under push the myth that we must do everything alone, that to rely on another is to be weak, that asking for help is a moral failing. But nature does not function this way, and neither do we.

For therians, interdependence is not an abstract theory; it is something we feel in our bones. It is the unspoken knowing that survival is communal, that our care for each other is not weakness but instinct. A wolf does not hesitate to return for its wounded. A rabbit does not question whether its warren-mate deserves protection. A flock does not leave its members behind in a storm. *These bonds aren't transactional; they're the way we work, what it means to be alive.*

We do not simply choose to support one another—we must. It's in the way a pack shares warmth, curling together against the cold. It's in the way a warren shelters its own, digging deep to create safety in a

world that does not offer it freely. It is in the way a pride fiercely protects, standing unwavering in defence of its kin. It is in the way a flock moves together in flight, adjusting, adapting. It's not just care—it's survival, it's how we endure.

Rejecting isolation is an act of survival. It is an act of defiance. It is a refusal to be carved apart by a world that seeks to make us small, that tells us we must prove our worth to be deserving of care.

We know better. We know that to survive alone is not strength—it is suffering. That true strength is in community, in knowing that we do not have to hold the weight of existence alone. That there is no shame in reaching for one another, in building something greater than ourselves.

We have always known another way. And we will keep knowing it, living it, building it. Together.

Interdependence in the Face of Abandonment

The state tells us it cannot care for us. Instead, it offers bureaucracy—means-tested welfare, inaccessible healthcare, and laws that punish rather than protect. It insists that society is too large, too complex to accommodate individual needs, shifting the burden onto communities, families, and individuals themselves. And yet, when we attempt to care for one another outside of its structures, we are surveilled, regulated, criminalised. The state claims care is impossible, but what it really means is that care is conditional—available only to those who can prove their worth, only to those who fit its narrow standards of who deserves to be helped.

But even as the state abandons us, it polices and punishes those who create alternative systems of survival. Mutual aid groups, community shelters, and chosen families—especially queer, disabled, and neurodivergent ones—become sites of resistance against a world that would rather see the vulnerable left behind. We are told that "community" is where care should happen, yet when we build those

communities—when we create our own networks of housing, food, medical care, and protection—suddenly, we are threats. Squats are raided. Street medics are arrested. Shelters are underfunded, unrecognised, or dismantled.

Therians, who often exist in the margins of these already marginalised spaces, know this deeply. We have lived it. We have felt the cold indifference of a system that expects us to survive in spite of it, not because of it. We know what it means to be told: You must fend for yourself. But survival is not a solitary endeavour.

Not for us. Not for any creature.

And so, we do what wolves, lions, rabbits, and birds have always done—we form our own structures of care, not out of obligation, but out of instinct.

We do it not because we have been given permission, but because we must. While society demands that care be earned, we understand it as something far more fundamental: the only way forward.

- Where the state offers cold systems of eligibility, we create warm, living networks of belonging.
- Where human society isolates the struggling, we pull them close.
- Where capitalism teaches that resources must be hoarded, we share freely, knowing that survival depends on it.

This is not charity. This is not kindness for the sake of kindness. This is survival. A wolf pack does not abandon its injured; it adapts to keep them safe. A rabbit warren does not exile its anxious; it shelters them in quiet vigilance. A pride does not ration love; it raises its young together. A flock does not forget those who fall behind; it circles back.

And these are not metaphors. They are models of care that predate society, instincts that endure despite every system trying to strip them from us. These are the truths that have carried us forward since the beginning of life itself.

To be therian is not just to experience oneself as an animal. It is to live as one. To recognise that interdependence is not a weakness, but a survival strategy. To reject the state's imposed scarcity and instead return to something older, wilder, and infinitely more true:

We care for each other, because it is who we are.

How Do We Create and Live These Bonds among Humans?

Pack, warren, pride, and flock life are not metaphors, but they are also lived realities. People already embody these forms of care, even if they do not always have the words for them.

- A pack forms when a group ensures that no one goes hungry, no one faces hardship alone, no one is abandoned.
- A warren is built when a safe home is created, where the nervous and overwhelmed are given shelter, where care is quiet but ever-present.
- A pride stands strong when a community refuses to let its members be erased, when they defend their own with unwavering strength.
- A flock moves with the knowledge that sometimes, survival means change, that care is found in adaptability, in holding space for those who must leave and return.

These systems exist whether they are named or not. The only difference is that we, as therians, know them for what they are.

In the following sections, we will explore how these structures take form—not only in the wild but in the ways we create kinship, protection, and love in a world that doesn't always make space for us.

Rituals of Care: Strengthening Bonds in Our Kinship

Care is not just what we do in crisis. It is not only the hand extended when someone stumbles, the howl that calls back to the lost. Care is also the quiet, steady rhythm of our lives, the rituals that weave us together. It is in the way we greet each other, the way we make space, the way we return again and again to those who share our breath and shelter.

All creatures have rituals of care. Wolves reaffirm bonds through nuzzling, through playful roughhousing, through the soft press of

their bodies against one another in rest. Rabbits groom each other, reinforcing trust in small, quiet motions. Birds preen their kin, sing to their flock, return to the same nesting grounds year after year. These acts are not about necessity alone—they are about belonging. They are about knowing, deep in the bones, that you are one of us, that you are safe here.

And so, we too should and must create our own rituals of care, here are a few but it is by no mens exhaustive:

- The touchstones of kinship—a worn hoodie passed between packmates, a shared blanket, a mug set down beside a friend without a word.
- The reassurances given freely—a morning check-in, a whispered *you are safe here*, the ritual of sending a message before sleep: I am here if you need me.
- The gatherings we make space for—soup nights, long walks, shared meals, moments stolen away from the world where we can simply exist together, without performance or pretence.
- The offerings we leave for one another—small gifts of care, food left aside, an extra portion prepared for the one who forgets to eat, a jacket draped over the shoulders of a shivering friend.

These things may seem small, but they are the scaffolding of trust. They are the ways we tell each other, again and again: I see you. You are not alone.

You are held in this place, in this bond, in this shared belonging.

Ritual is what makes care sustainable. Without it, care is reactive—something done in moments of emergency. But when we build rituals of care, we make it part of the everyday, part of the structure of our lives. We make it so that no one must ask to be loved, no one must beg for warmth, no one must wonder whether they belong. They will know, because it will be woven into the very fabric of their days.

Care is not only what we do when someone is suffering. It is how we ensure they never have to suffer alone.

Pack Life: Wolves, Dogs, and the Structure of Loyalty

For those of us who experience ourselves as wolves, dogs, or other pack-oriented creatures, care is structured around bonds of loyalty, interdependence, and shared survival. Wolves do not function in hierarchical "alpha" structures, as pop culture insists. Rather, they rely on deep familial bonds, cooperation, and roles that shift depending on the needs of the pack. As David L. Mech, a leading wolf researcher, states, "*A wolf pack is a family… the adult wolves are simply parents, and the rest of the pack are their offspring.*"

In a therian context, pack life means:

Protecting one another: Not through dominance, but through presence. The pack does not abandon its injured; it cares for them, adapts for them, makes space for them.

This kind of loyalty-driven cooperation can be seen in intentional communities like Twin Oaks in Virginia, where members share labor, income, and care responsibilities. Much like a wolf pack, these communities function on deep bonds of trust and interdependence, ensuring that no one is left behind. Their model of shared survival mirrors the way wolves tend to their pack-mates, shifting roles as needed to support those who are sick, aging, or injured. In a pack, loyalty is not a word but an action—one demonstrated daily in collective responsibility.

Hunting together: Maybe not literally, but in the sense of sharing resources, ensuring no one goes without, making sure every member has what they need.

Sleeping together: Even if this is only metaphorically. Sleeping together. Even if this is only metaphorically, there is something primal in the way therians huddle—physically or emotionally—against the cold. In the wild, survival is often dictated by warmth, by proximity, by the press of bodies sharing breath beneath the moon. For wolves, for rabbits, for pride-mates, for flocks perched wing-to-wing, the night is not meant to be faced alone.

We, too, understand this instinct. Some of us find solace in shared

dens, in the weight of a trusted companion's presence beside us. Others find it in words spoken softly across the dark, in the quiet rituals of friendship and care—a check-in, a long conversation, a promise that says, I will not let you be alone. Even those who struggle with physical closeness still crave the certainty that they are held, that someone is near, that they do not have to navigate this world in solitude.

To sleep together is more than just a matter of physical rest. It is about security. It is about knowing that even in your most vulnerable state—curled up, unconscious, drifting—you are protected. That if something stirs in the night, if danger comes, you are not alone to face it. This is why we find comfort in the presence of our kin, why a simple message before sleep—"I'm here if you need me"—carries the weight of an unspoken vow.

Some of us grew up without this assurance. Without the warmth of safety, without the knowledge that someone would stay, would remain, would keep watch. And so, as adults, we build it for each other. We create spaces where the night is no longer something to be feared but something to be shared. A pack curled close, a warren of whispered reassurances, a pride where no one is left outside the circle, a flock whose members keep to the same sky, even if miles stretch between them. Even if we are distant, even if our hands never touch, the act of holding space for one another is an ancient one. You are safe. You are seen. You are not alone. This is the promise we make, whether beneath the same roof or across the vast distances between us. And it is enough.

For those who run with the wolves, survival is not about independence; it is about *interdependence*. We are not lone wolves—we are creatures who need our pack to survive.

But pack life is not just about survival. It is about trust. It is knowing that even in the darkest of times, even when you are wounded or lost, someone will come looking for you. It is understanding that when you howl into the void, your pack will howl back. This kind of care is instinctual, woven into the fabric of what it means to be a pack animal. You do not simply love your pack; you

belong to it. You carry them in your bones.

Pack therians, especially those who align with wolves and dogs, know that care is something that must be lived. It is not enough to simply claim loyalty—it must be demonstrated, over and over again, through action, through patience, through unwavering presence. A pack does not function on empty words. It thrives on the everyday gestures of devotion: the shared meal, the steady companionship, the understanding of when to stand together, when to give space.

This is why pack-based care is so essential for those who struggle with abandonment, trauma, or displacement. A pack does not demand perfection. It does not exile its members for being tired, for being hurt, for needing more than they can give at times. Instead, it adapts. It makes room. It allows for weakness, knowing that strength is something that ebbs, flows—something meant to be held together.

For many therians, the myth of the "lone wolf" has always been a disconnect with the reality of wolf-behaviour—and this is something I wrote about in my second howl: *Radical compassion for Therians and other animals*, where Therian and wolf-writer **`Rain the Grey`** conveys more eloquently than I can: *"A lone wolf is not a natural state. It is a wounded state. We heal best in the company of those who understand our howls."*

Wolves do not seek isolation—they seek kin. Even the rare wolf who finds themselves alone is, more often than not, searching for their pack, seeking the rhythm of shared breath, the warmth of bodies pressed close in the deep night. This is what it means to be pack—to be held in the presence of others, to be known, to be protected, to know that even when the world is cold and cruel, you're not forgotten.

Pack life is not a rigid structure, nor a hierarchy to climb. It is a dance of interdependence, a weaving of instinct and care, a promise that says: '*I will stand by you. I will fight for you. I will never let you be lost, not while I have breath left to give.*'

For therians who align with wolves, dogs, or other pack creatures, the meaning of care is simple: We do not let each other go.

Warren Life: Rabbits, Rodents, and the Power of Collective Care

For those who find themselves aligned with rabbits, hares, and rodents, care manifests in the warren—the dense, interconnected network of tunnels and burrows that provide shelter and security. Warrens are not just homes; they are social ecosystems where every member contributes to the safety of the whole.

Rabbits, in particular, have a highly sophisticated system of communication and care. They thump warnings, groom each other, and rely on the collective vigilance of the group to protect themselves. A lone rabbit is an easy target; a warren is a fortress.

This idea of a warren—an interconnected refuge—is reflected in co-housing movements, where people come together to create safe, supportive environments.

In a therian context, warren life means:

- Creating safe space where we may retreat, recover, find solace.
- Practicing nonverbal care—sometimes words are too much.a nuzzle, a touch, simply being near each other is enough.
- Being highly attuned to distress in others, knowing that one member's anxiety affects the whole group.
- Recognising that no one is disposable. A warren does not exile its members; it shelters them.

This kind of care is especially important for neurodivergent therians, where we experience sensory sensitivities and social anxieties. In a warren, care is ever-present. No one's goes without.

Warren care is about more than just safety—it is about deep-rooted trust. It is knowing that when the world outside is loud and predatory, there is always a place where you can let your guard down. It is about existing in a space where care is woven into the fabric of daily life, where mutual protection is instinctive, and where the collective strength of the whole outweighs any single vulnerability.

For many therians, warren life also means recognising the importance of hidden strength. Rabbits and hares may not seem powerful in a traditional sense, but they have survived through

adaptability, awareness, and connection. They are creatures of deep resilience, capable of incredible feats of speed, agility, and endurance when pressed. A warren embodies this resilience—not by standing against the world in open defiance, but by moving through it with quiet, unshakable determination.

This model of care is vital in a world that so often demands constant visibility, productivity, and individual competition. To live as a warren is to reject the idea that one must always be on display, always be fighting alone. Instead, it is to find safety in numbers, to build a refuge beneath the surface, and to trust that even in moments of stillness, even in silence, care remains.

Warren life reminds us that survival is not about aggression or dominance, but about knowing when to retreat, when to rest, and when to move as one. It teaches that gentleness is a form of strength, that small bodies can hold immense courage, and that home is not just a place, but the creatures who welcome you back time and again.

For therians aligned with rabbits, hares, and rodents, the warren is not just a shelter. It is a way of life—a testament to the power of kinship, quiet endurance, and a sacred trust that says: You are not alone. You are seen, protected, and valued. The warren is safety in numbers, a space where vulnerability is met with care, where every individual matters. It is the comfort of soft bodies pressed close, the quiet understanding of shared survival, the unspoken promise that no one will be left behind.

The warren is not just a shelter. It is a way of life—a testament to the power of kinship, quiet endurance, and a sacred trust that says: You are not alone. You are seen, protected, and valued. The warren is safety in numbers—a space where vulnerability is met with care, where even the timid find courage and the weary find rest, where each member plays a part—one stands guard while others rest—and where every individual matters. It is the comfort of soft bodies pressed close, hearts beating in gentle unison, the wordless understanding of shared survival

Pride Life: Lions, Big Cats, and Fierce, Communal Strength

Among big cats, lions are unique in their social structure. While most felines are solitary, lions form prides—tight-knit, cooperative family groups where hunting, child-rearing, and protection are shared responsibilities. Female lions, in particular, are the backbone of the pride, raising cubs together and defending their territory in a way that is both nurturing and powerful. Male lions, often seen as symbols of strength, are not mere dominators but protectors, warding off threats and ensuring the survival of their kin.

For those who align with lions, jaguars, or other big cats with strong maternal instincts, therian pride life means:

- Collective child-rearing: whether literally or through mentorship and guidance. Elders pass down wisdom, not through rigid hierarchy, but through care and example.
- Holding space for both strength and vulnerability: acknowledging that to be fierce does not mean to be unfeeling. Roaring is not just for battle but also for calling loved ones home.
- Defending one another, not just physically, but emotionally: standing up for pack-mates in the face of harm, refusing to let them be isolated or discarded.
- Knowing that love is not a resource that must be rationed: it is something that grows the more it is shared.

Love is protection, provision, presence.

Prides are unapologetic in their care. They do not shrink from their responsibility to one another. In a world that often preaches self-reliance as isolation, lion-hearted therians know that survival and flourishing are built on mutual reliance, trust, and shared power.

This fierce model of communal care is evident in historical movements like the *Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for Children Program*. An article in *Teen Vogue* tells the story:

"The Free Breakfast for Children Program was a significant initiative by the Black Panther Party, aiming to address food insecurity and demonstrate community care. The program's impact was

profound, with reports indicating that it served meals to thousands of children daily, fostering a sense of community and support. Teachers observed that students who participated in the program showed improved academic performance and attentiveness, highlighting the program's effectiveness."

One Panther recalled, *'These kids would come in, hungry, tired. And they'd leave with full bellies and the knowledge that someone gave a damn about them. That's power.'* Melvin Dickson, an organiser for the Oakland breakfast program also said: *"The food component of the BPP was a big part of our organising. This included our free breakfast program. Because one thing you can guarantee in an oppressed community is that you're going to find hunger."*

Recognising that systemic neglect endangered Black children, they built their own systems of care, ensuring thousands of kids had meals every day. Like lionesses defending their young, this was not just charity—it was survival, defiance, and the unwavering commitment to protecting their own. A pride does not wait for permission to care —it claims its own and stands strong.

For therians, adopting pride-based models of care means rejecting the scarcity mindset that capitalism forces upon us. There is always enough love, enough strength, enough room for another. A true pride does not abandon its own. It does not let its wounded be left behind. It does not cut off the struggling, nor turn its back on the aging or ill. Instead, it pulls close, it shelters, it provides.

To live as a lion, as a jaguar, a big cat as a great and untamed beast of communal strength is, with the added nuance of being a feline, is —similar to those lessons learned as a packs of canids— to refuse the lie that we must fight alone. It is to say: We are together, we thrive.

Where prides teach us to stand our ground, to hold fiercely to our kin, flocks remind us that sometimes care means movement—freedom and fluidity, the ability to lift one another skyward. In a pride, we root ourselves in place, in shared strength and unwavering presence, guarding what is ours and ensuring no one is left behind. In a flock, we learn that care is not always about remaining still, but about guiding, adapting, and knowing when to take flight together. A lion does not wander far from its pride, but a bird may leave and return

with the shifting of seasons. Some of us find sanctuary in stability, in the weight of bodies pressed close, in the assurance that we will never have to weather the storm alone.

Others find solace in the open sky, in knowing that even when we part, we are not truly lost to one another.

To be a therian of the pride is to roar in defence of our own. To be of the flock is to call across distances, to circle back, to carry knowledge and care between far-flung kin. Both ways of being are vital, both teach us something essential about how we hold and are held. We are not always meant to stay in one place; sometimes love, survival, and care are best shown by letting go, by trusting that we will find each other again in the great, boundless expanse of the world.

Flock Life: Birds, Messengers, and the Strength of flight & Movement

Birds do not only exist as flocks, but as messengers, as scavengers, as watchers of the world. They move together not just for survival, but for a shared knowing—a collective awareness that allows them to navigate vast migrations with precision and grace. A flock is not simply a mass of creatures moving in the same direction; it is a living, breathing network, a system of instinct, trust, and mutual care.

Therians experiencing themselves as birds—be they crows, pigeons, raptors, or songbirds—often find a care in movement, in observation, in a shared rhythm of *community*, knowing the quiet communication of glance and gesture, an unspoken understanding guiding a group through shifting landscapes, a strength in motion. Flight is concurrently escape, embrace, freedom and belonging.

To be a therian of the flock is to know when to soar alone and when to return to the murmuration. It is to see the world from above, to be the one who watches, who witnesses, who remembers. It is to scavenge, to gather, to share—to know that nothing is wasted, that wisdom and nourishment alike must be passed down.

A flock moves together, but each bird within it remains distinct, a

vital part of a greater whole.

This instinctive, flexible form of care was seen in the mutual aid networks that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities self-organised to provide food deliveries, financial assistance, and emergency support, responding fluidly to shifting needs—just like a murmuration of birds adjusting mid-flight to navigate a storm. No one person controlled these networks; they existed as decentralised, collective movements, ensuring that care reached those who needed it most.

A flock does not move aimlessly—it moves with awareness, with purpose, and with the unspoken promise that none will be left behind.

In a world that demands isolation, flock therians remind us that there is power in knowing when to land and when to take to the sky. There is strength in the wind beneath our wings and in the ones who fly beside us. For the flock, care means:

- Communication—calling out to one another. No one gets lost.
- Traveling together, whether in literal movement or in shared journeys of identity, healing, and self-discovery.
- Offering wisdom, guidance, and stories. Birds are often mythological messengers; therians aligned with them often serve as storytellers and keepers of knowledge.
- Holding space for those who are still learning to fly. Flocks wait. They circle back. They teach.

Flock life is about connection across distance. Even when we are apart, we are never truly alone.

Instinct and Adaptation: Building Kinship Beyond

There are many ways to structure care, and I want to acknowledge that packs, prides, warrens, and flocks are only some of the forms it can take. There are myriad other models of kinship and survival—colonies, pods, herds, nests, and even looser, shifting coalitions that defy easy categorisation. In focusing on these four, I do not mean to exclude the richness of other experiences, only to provide a framework that offers insight into the

ways therians might shape their own collective bonds. The truth is, no structure is ever fixed, and most of us find ourselves blending elements from multiple forms of care.

Even within a single group, there will always be differences—some creatures thrive in the tight interdependence of a pack, while others need the space and fluidity of a flock.

Beyond these structures, other kinship models exist—pods among whales, herds among ungulates, colonies of scavengers. Some of us are migratory, some territorial, some symbiotic. No one form is superior; what matters is finding what sustains us.

Some rely on the steady, communal strength of a pride, while others find solace in the quiet, nurturing security of a warren. The beauty of our instinctual ways of care is that they do not demand strict adherence to one form or another. Instead, they offer us starting points, a way to understand the roles we take on and the needs we fulfil within our chosen families.

Adaptability is key, and for many of us, this means learning to navigate spaces that may not have been built with us in mind. A canine in a pride must learn the rhythms of big-cat life, just as a rabbit in a pack must navigate the differences between pack-style loyalty and the quieter, collective vigilance of a warren. In my own life, I have found myself shaped not only by the call of the pack but by the fierce, nurturing bonds of the pride I share with my polycule.

We make space for each other's instincts, our needs and our ways of being, weaving together a structure that is neither purely one thing nor another, but something uniquely ours.

And they all do not exist in isolation. They intersect with broader networks of mutual aid—queer shelters, radical kitchens, anarchist clinics, and community defence. Just as the wounded wolf is cared for, we extend that instinct outward, recognising that kinship is not only a matter of survival but of defiant, intentional solidarity.

What matters is not fitting into a predetermined mould but ensuring that our collective endeavours meet the needs of those within them. Whether wolf, lion, rabbit, fox, or bird, we build our kinship by choosing each other, again and again.

The Kin We Choose & the Care We give

Care cannot be dictated by state or society. Therians know this, perhaps better than most; that the ways we care for one another are primal, instinctive, real. It is not a system of obligation, nor a structure imposed from above—it is a knowing that comes from deep within, older than language, older than law. It is written into our movements, our instincts, our need to seek warmth in the presence of others. We do not build our lives around transactional relationships, but around the deep, visceral knowledge that to be alone is to be vulnerable, and to be together is to survive.

We do not wait for permission to nurture one another. In a world that tells us care must be earned—through labor, through conformity, through proving our worth—we reject that notion entirely. We care because it is in our bones to do so. We create packs, warrens, prides, and flocks because that is how we live—not just as humans, but as creatures, as kin. This is not a utopian fantasy; it is the simple, undeniable reality of those who know what it means to exist in the wild, in the margins, in the spaces where the structures of human civilisation have failed us. We do not beg for a better world. We build it, with each act of care, each bond forged in defiance of abandonment.

There is no scarcity in love, no ledger by which we measure who deserves warmth, food, shelter, or protection. We do not ration care to those who have proven themselves useful. We do not turn our backs on the wounded, the lost, or the struggling. Instead, we draw closer. We open our homes, our dens, our nests. We share what we have, because that is the only way any of us has ever survived.

And this is more than survival—it is resistance. To care in a world built on exploitation is an act of defiance. To prioritise one another over profit, to create networks of mutual aid in the face of imposed scarcity, to refuse to let anyone be discarded—this is how we reclaim what has been taken from us. The world tells us to compete, to hoard, to leave behind those who cannot keep up. But we know a different

way. We do not discard our elders, our sick, our struggling—we carry them. We walk at their pace. We defend them, because they are ours.

In the end, society may never care for us. It may continue to see us as strange, as wild, as other. But we will always care for each other. Because we know that care is not conditional. It is not something we owe, but something we are. It is the blood that ties us to one another, the instinct that tells us to stay close when the cold winds blow, the whisper in our bones that says: We do not survive alone.

It is the warmth of shared breath in the dark, the steady presence of kin who do not turn away. It is the knowledge that when we falter, hands will catch us, that when we call out, voices will answer. It is the certainty that love is not a debt, but a fire—growing, spreading, lighting the way home. It doesn't burn out or fade, and that's what always matters.

The Fluidity of Kinship: Shifting Between All Our Collectives

No creature moves through the world unchanged, and neither do the bonds that hold us together. The structures of kinship we build—packs, warrens, prides, flocks—are not rigid systems but living, breathing things, as adaptable as the creatures who inhabit them.

A therian aligned with wolf-hood may find themselves in a warren, seeking the quiet security of collective care. A rabbit might learn to roar with a pride, discovering the strength to take up space. A bird may choose to run with the pack for a time, finding comfort in the nearness of shared breath. We are not confined to a single mode of survival, nor should we be. Our kinship is fluid, shifting with our needs, our instincts, and the rhythms of our lives.

This fluidity is what allows us to care for one another most effectively. It acknowledges that survival is not a fixed state but an ever-changing dance, requiring different steps at different times. There are moments we need to be held close, and moments we need to fly free. There are times we must burrow deep for safety, and times we must stand boldly in the sun.

In a world that demands stability, predictability, and clear-cut definitions of relationship and responsibility, the way we move between these forms of care is a quiet defiance. We reject the idea that our worth is measured by consistency alone—that to belong, we must stay fixed in one place, one role, one form. Instead, we choose something wilder, more natural: the understanding that love, safety, and kinship are not just about where we are but who we are with.

And so, we adapt. We listen to the instincts that tell us where we need to be, who we need beside us, what kind of care we must give and receive.

We move through the world as creatures do—not according to the structures of human society, but according to these subtle and necessary rhythms of the wild.

Recognising The Bonds That Sustain Us

The systems we build are a reclamation of something ancient and instinctive. The packs, warrens, prides, flocks—are not just alternative structures of care. They are how we have always survived, how all creatures survive. Society, with its laws and institutions, may attempt to dictate the terms of care, but we know better. Care is not something to be earned or meted out in measured portions. It is not a privilege reserved for the worthy. It is the essence of survival itself, the pulse that keeps us moving, the warmth that holds us together when the night is long and cold.

Therians understand this deeply, not as theory but as lived truth. We know that to care for one another is not an obligation—it is an instinct, an undeniable drive. When the world tells us to fend for ourselves, to stand apart, we instead draw close. When it demands we leave the weak behind, we create space for them. And in doing so, we do not just resist society's failings—we prove that another way is possible, and has always been possible. This is not survival. This is life.

And so, if you are listening, if this howl has found you—know that you are part of something vast, something wild, something enduring.

You are not lost in the wilderness, nor adrift in the dark.

The structures of care we build—our packs, our warrens, our prides, our flocks—are not just metaphors but living truths, the living embodiment of our instincts made manifest in the ways we hold, protect, and nurture one another.

If you have been cast out, if the world has told you that you must fend for yourself, know that you do not have to do so alone. The pack does not abandon its own; when you call out, voices will answer. The warren does not exile its weary; there is always a burrow waiting for your return. The pride does not ration love; it shelters, defends, and refuses to let go. And the flock does not forget its scattered kin; it circles back, carrying wisdom, care, and warmth across vast distances.

Even in the quiet, in the unseen corners of the world, our ways persist. In whispered reassurances, in meals shared without expectation, in hands outstretched without demand—our kinship endures. Even when we are apart, we are never truly alone.

So trust in the call, in the bond that holds us beyond words, beyond distance, beyond the forces that would sever us.

We are here. We are together. We are the howl in the dark, the steady warmth in the cold. And we will take care of each other—again, and again, and again. No matter how far we stray, no matter how many times we must find our way back, we will return. Because this is what we are. Because this is what we do.

Moving forward: Building Systems of Care

Care is <u>not</u> a theory. It is not a distant dream or a future possibility—it is something we create now, in the spaces between us, in the choices we make every day. The world tells us to stand alone, to fight for scraps, to hoard what little we have. But we know a different way. We have always known.

To begin is not to wait for permission. It is not to ask whether you are ready or worthy of kinship, of care, of a life built in connection with others. You already are. You always have been.

But where do you start?

Well, here are some ideas, and they are not exhaustive.

1. Find Your Pack, Warren, Pride, or Flock

You are not the only one searching. There are others—howling, thumping, calling across distance, waiting for someone to recognise them. Seek them out. This could mean:

- Connecting with other therians, queers, neuro-divergent people, or anyone else who understands chosen family.
- Finding local or online communities where you feel at home. Discord servers, forums, local meet-ups—these can be first steps toward kinship.
- If you already have people in your life who share your instincts for care, name it. Recognise the bonds for what they are—your pack, your warren, your pride, your flock.

2. Build-in Small Acts of Mutual Care

You don't need to create an entire care network overnight. Start small, and let it grow:

- Check in on your kin. A message, a meal, a shared resource.
- Offer help before it is asked for. Normalise giving without debt.
- Create shared spaces—physical or digital—where support is constant, not conditional. This can be as small as a group chat for emotional support or as big as a community fridge/pantry or housing co-op.

3. Reject the Scarcity Mindset

Capitalism teaches us that care is transactional. That there is only so much love, so much safety, so much space. This is a lie. Care grows the more it is shared. Instead of asking: "Who deserves help?" Perhaps instead ask:"How can we ensure no one is left behind?"

This means sharing what you can, whether it's food, time, money, or knowledge. It means practicing *solidarity, not charity*—recognising that helping each other is not about pity, but about survival and strength.

4. Learn from the Care Models Already in Place

We are not the first to build kinship outside of society's structures. Look to the ones who have done it before:

- Mutual aid networks—Local groups offering food, medical supplies, and financial support without bureaucracy.
- Queer & disabled communities—Models of chosen family and accessibility-based care that have long resisted abandonment.
- Indigenous resistance movements—Generations of land and kinship stewardship against colonial violence.

We do not have to start from nothing. We only have to *remember*.

5. Trust That You Are Not Alone

There will be days when you feel cut off, when it seems like no one hears your call. But you are not alone. Someone, somewhere, is listening. Someone is waiting for you, just as you are waiting for them.

However small, however uncertain—begin. Call out, and trust that a creature will call back.

Building Community: How We Tend to Each Other

To care for another is to learn their rhythms. It is to listen, to pay attention, to know without being told what someone needs, when they need space, when they need presence, when they need nothing but the knowledge that someone will be there.

Care is not a single act. It is an ongoing practice, something we commit to again and again. And it is not always easy. Sometimes care is about patience, about unlearning the ways the world has told us love must be earned. Sometimes it is about holding back judgment, about recognising that a struggling friend may not always have the words to reach out, may not always be able to articulate their need.

And so, we practice care in all its forms:

1. Listening and witnessing

• Holding space without trying to fix or solve.

• Allowing emotions to be expressed fully, without interruption or dismissal.

2. Providing and sustaining

• Sharing food, shelter, resources—ensuring that no one goes without.

• Tending to each other's needs, even the ones that seem small—

reminding someone to eat, to take their meds, to step outside for air.

3. Protecting and defending

• Standing between our kin and those who would harm them.

• Knowing when to fight, when to step in, when to say you will not touch them, you will not hurt them.

4. Guiding and mentoring

• Sharing knowledge, passing down skills, helping each other grow.

• Learning from those who came before, and teaching those who will come after.

5. Honouring and remembering

• Speaking the names of those we have lost, keeping them with us in story and ritual.

• Acknowledging each other's histories, carrying them forward so they are never erased.

The practice of care is lifelong. It does not begin and end in moments of crisis. It is not something we do out of obligation, but out of recognition: that we are bound to each other, that our survival is shared, that to tend to another is to tend to the world we are building together. We do not abandon. We do not let each other go. This is the promise we make, not once, but always.

Not the End…
But A Beginning

These words are not the end of something, but the beginning. If this howl has found you, know that it is yours to carry forward—the call for a wilder, more connected way of being, one where no creature is left behind, where no voice calling out for care is met with silence. We have always survived together. Even when the world insists we must fend for ourselves, we know a different truth. Our survival has never been solitary. It has always been communal, always been something we built together, shoulder to shoulder, breath to breath, woven from the instinct to hold and be held, to shelter and be sheltered.

- In a squat in Berlin, a group of unhoused queers created a 'warren'—a space where no one was left outside, where food was

always shared, where safety was built from trust rather than state intervention.

- In New Orleans after the hurricane, a makeshift 'pack' formed—people checking in, providing medicine, ensuring no one was forgotten. No paperwork. No charity. Just care.

In the forests, crows leave gifts for those who feed them. Wolves return to their wounded. Even the wind carries the call of a distant flock. This is the nature of things. A rabbit does not exile its anxious. A lion does not ration its love. A bird does not abandon its own to the storm. Neither should we.

Care is not a scarce resource. It is not something to be hoarded, measured, or earned. It is something we give, without hesitation, without demand, without limit—because it is who we are.

The Sound of Many Voices

This is not just my howl—it is ours. It belongs to every creature who has ever chosen kinship over isolation, every soul who has reached out and whispered *you are not alone.*

The pack does not abandon its own. The warren does not exile its weary. The pride does not ration love. The flock does not forget its scattered kin. So begin.

If you are reading this, if you have felt this truth in your own life, I invite you to share it. What does care look like in your world? What does it feel like to be held, to be known?

Write your own howl. Speak of your kin. Share your story. Let it be heard, let it be answered.

We're here.

About Shimi:

Shimi is a transsexual anarchist, a Therian, a writer, artist, musician & punk poet living in Seattle with a cat and a whole bunch of other animal-creachurs.

A ragingly unrepentant faggot, a relationship anarchist, therian-for-therian and sapphic furfag. "I'm a skinny little rat-faced girl, an apex scav, with a bitey li'l critter inside my head."

Email: clairefoxx@icloud.com